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**PATRICIA RAYBON, AUTHOR OF 'MY FIRST WHITE FRIEND,'
TO SPEAK AT UD AS PART OF DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS SERIES**

DAYTON, Ohio — In her book, Patricia Raybon gets right to the point.

"God help me," she begins. "I stopped hating white people on purpose about a year ago. I didn't tell anybody. I couldn't. If I did, I would have to explain how I started hating in the first place. And I really didn't know then myself."

Raybon will talk about racial forgiveness as part of the University of Dayton's Distinguished Speakers Series. The speech, "Forgiveness and Race: Creating Racial Health and Personal Power," will be held at 8 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 18, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom during Black History Month. Admission to the speech is free and open to the public.

In her 1996 book, *My First White Friend: Confessions of Race, Love and Forgiveness*, Raybon traces her rage back to her 1950s upbringing in the "whiteness" of eastern Colorado. But she also journeys further back in history — to her father's harsh 1920s Mississippi upbringing and to her mother's protected black community in North Carolina. In between, she jumps to her own experiences as a child in Colorado and, more recently, as a newspaper editor and college professor.

The title of the book stems from Raybon's open letter to a long-lost friend from junior high school. "I have to thank you. For going. For reaching. For risking and trying," Raybon writes to Kerry Monroe, the first to befriend her when she moved to a mostly white community at age 14. "I'm just understanding it now, that more than your face and your skin and your hair — those things I was supposed to disdain and despise — your kindness was something rare and shining."

Raybon, who got her newspaper start as a city desk reporter for the *Denver Post*, has had essays published in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *USA Today* and many other papers around the country. She also contributes commentary to National Public Radio's *Weekend Edition*.

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When she gave birth to a light-skinned, blue-eyed daughter, skin color became an even-more sensitive issue to Raybon. “Call this a breakthrough. I was learning. From this baby I was finally understanding that our outside covering simply cannot matter,” she writes.

Raybon is now an associate professor of journalism at the University of Colorado, a job which she says has also helped in her path to racial forgiveness. “So I am naive enough, perhaps, to believe that my presence in the classroom, if nothing else, is a direct challenge to the stereotypical attitudes some of them still hold. But it turns out that they challenge my own stereotypical attitudes. So, in the end, all of us learn something from each other. My being here forces each of us to learn something from each other. My being here forces each to cross a bridge and stretch. That is why I teach white students.”

Color isn’t everything, Raybon says she learned from her students. “That’s the plain truth, and sometimes ordinary people need to remind ourselves: Most people are more alike than they are different.”

Her book, which is part diary and part social commentary, also incorporates the stories of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.

In the preface she describes it this way. “Take this as a diary. Or a journal. Or a journey: A long ride back, with stops along the way to sort things out — then forgive them, forget them. Then it’s time to move on.”

Raybon has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Ohio State University and a master’s degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She lives near Denver.

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For media interviews, call **Patricia Raybon** at (303) 693-0808 or e-mail raybonp@spot.colorado.edu. For information about UD’s Distinguished Speaker Series, call **Kathy Duell** at (937) 229-4114.